

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Bernabella Abril, 71, coffee farmer

"We have to pound 'em [the coffee] by ourself, you know. . . . If not, the children help us squeeze 'em [squeeze the coffee between two fingers]. The whole night we have to do that, and oh, sometime, 'Oh, my God!' I stay thinking. But we have to do that because we need the coffee because we need the money for pay food and everything we need."

Bernabella Abril, Ilocano, was born on June 8, 1910 in Laoag, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. Her father farmed and her mother took care of 14 children.

In 1923, Bernabella, her parents, and one brother came to Hawaii. They were assigned to Hawi Plantation in Kohala, where her father was a field laborer. On weekends, Bernabella, too, worked in the cane fields. Later, they moved to Union Mill, Kohala.

In 1929, the same year she got married, Bernabella and her husband moved to Kona and picked coffee. In the years that followed, she divided her time between coffee picking and child rearing. Eventually, the Abrils leased their own coffee land and became farmers.

Between 1958 and 1968, Bernabella also owned and operated a store in Captain Cook.

Today, Bernabella grows coffee and papaya on her farm in Middle Ke'ei, Kona. She is the mother of 16 children.

Tape No. 9-12-1-80 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Bernabella Abril (BA)

November 11, 1980

Middle Ke'ei, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Modesto Daranciang (MD) and Michiko Kodama (MK)

[NOTE: [Interview conducted in Ilocano. Translation done by Modesto Daranciang.]

MD: This is an interview with Bernabella Abril. We are at her home in Middle Ke'ei, Kona, Hawaii. Today is November 11, 1980.

Where and when were you born?

BA: I was born on June 8, 1910 in the Philippines.

MD: Where in the Philippines?

BA: Laoag, Ilocos Norte, Philippines.

MD: How many children were there in your family?

BA: Counting sisters and brothers, also the dead, we were 14.

MD: When you were young, what were your parents' work?

BA: They were planting rice, sugarcane and all edible plants.

MD: What were your neighbors doing also?

BA: They were doing the same work.

MD: Describe for us the kind of house you lived in in the Philippines.

BA: We had a very pitiful house. It was small. The roof was made of cogon grass. The posts were bamboo. The flooring was bamboo. We had a very hard life. My father was a farmer, and my mother was a housewife. She took care of the younger children.

MD: Was your place a barrio?

BA: Yes, it was a barrio.

MD: How many houses were there in the barrio?

BA: I think there were 50 houses or more.

MD: What did the barrio look like?

BA: Nice barrio. San Mateo Riweng. There was a school. There was a church and school.

MD: What foods did you eat?

BA: Marunggay with bagoong, dried fish and rice. Life was hard. If my father caught fish, we then eat fish. Sometimes we bought meat.

MD: How do you compare your parents' work to that of the neighbors?

BA: It seemed my parents' work was harder because they had plenty children. We did not own property. My father was a share farmer. My neighbors owned their own farm.

MD: How do you compare your house?

BA: It's the same. I think the poorest.

MD: How about life?

BA: The same, very poor.

MD: When you were at school age, what school did you attend?

BA: San Mateo School in our barrio.

MD: Who were the teachers?

BA: They were Ilocanos, Filipinos.

MD: What subjects did they teach?

BA: They taught counting, reading, arithmetic, and how to respect other people or the elders.

MD: Of those subjects taught, which subject did you like least?

BA: I liked least English.

MD: Which did you like best?

BA: Arts, arithmetic, sewing, and embroidery.

MD: Why was it that you liked some subjects while you didn't like some?

BA: I don't know (laughs), but I had a hard time learning some subjects,

and I was behind in those subjects.

MD: How long did you go to school in San Mateo?

BA: Three years. They wanted to promote me to fourth grade, but we were moving to Hawaii.

MD: How would you compare your schooling to that of the neighbor's children?

BA: I think my education was better than the neighbor classmates.

MD: What were your feelings when you left school?

BA: I felt sorry, but I was accompanying my parents to Hawaii.

MD: When you were not in school, what were your daily chores?

BA: We helped our parents harvest rice, plant corn, and plant rice.

MD: How about housework?

BA: We helped my mother clean house and wash clothes.

MD: What were your forms of recreation?

BA: We played. I watched card games because I was ashamed. Some went dancing. We only watched because we were not permitted to dance.

MD: What were your activities with your relatives?

BA: We talked, played, running and swimming.

MD: What games did you play with neighbors?

BA: Played ball and hopscotch.

MD: What occasions did you celebrate in the barrio?

BA: Christmas, New Year's, Good Friday, Good Thursday, the town's patron [saint day], birthdays, marriages, and other parties.

MD: How about church? Which did you attend?

BA: Philippine Independent Church.

MD: What were your activities in church?

BA: Praying and doing what the priest wants us to learn.

MD: What did you think about church?

BA: Church was good.

MD: How about the priest?

BA: The priest was good.

MD: As a teenager, did you work?

BA: We followed my father, planting foodstuffs like corn, sweet potatoes and rice. Also harvested rice and pounded rice.

MD: Were you paid for doing these?

BA: No pay.

MD: How did you feel about this work?

BA: I felt good even if I was not paid.

MD: What did you plan to be when you grew older?

BA: I wanted to be a good woman and a mother.

MD: In 1923 you planned to move to Hawaii. Why did you decide to move to Hawaii?

BA: Because my parents were moving to Hawaii, I wanted to be with them. I followed them.

MD: Did you hear about Hawaii from anybody?

BA: Yes, we heard from people going to Hawaii about the good life here, so my parents decided to come to Hawaii. My parents thought, perhaps, we find a better life here.

MD: When you planned to come here, what did you expect in Hawaii?

BA: I expected Hawaii to be nice to live and to stay.

MD: Were there other family members who came with you to Hawaii?

BA: My brother Juan, my father and my mother. Because only two [children] were allowed to accompany a couple, my sister was paired with my uncle because she wanted also to come to Hawaii.

MD: When you left the Philippines, were there other family members that went to other places?

BA: None. My two other siblings were left with my aunt because the agent did not allow all the children to accompany their parents.

MD: Were there others in your place who also came to Hawaii?

BA: Yes, there were plenty from our place.

MD: Were they your relatives?

BA: Relatives and neighbors.

MD: What were your feelings when you left the Philippines?

BA: I felt sad. I tried to forget it [the sadness], but I wanted to accompany my parents.

MD: How did you come to Hawaii?

BA: There was a representative from the immigration [BA refers to plantation labor recruiter]. We did not pay our fare and we can go back to the Philippines free after completing the three-years contract.

MD: What papers did you have to come to Hawaii?

BA: There were papers. A contract paper which says three years in Hawaii, you can go back to the Philippines free.

MD: What inspections did you have in the immigration?

BA: There were personal [physical] inspections. Even in the boat, there were daily inspections, health and sickness.

MD: Did you pay your way to Hawaii?

BA: No, we did not pay our way to Hawaii.

MD: What did you bring with you to Hawaii?

BA: Just a few clothes because we had kargada [cargo], two or three pieces of clothes each family. Shoes, hats and all needs of a family, including blanket were given.

MD: What date did you leave the Philippines?

BA: I do not remember. I forgot. I remember 1923, but I forgot the month.

MD: From which port did you leave the Philippines?

BA: Manila.

MD: What was the name of the ship?

BA: President Pierce.

MD: What were the conditions in the ship?

BA: The ship was nice, clean, happy atmosphere, plenty food and good life.

MD: What part of the ship were your quarters?

BA: We were at the bottom part. There were three stories.

MD: What were your sleeping quarters like?

BA: It was nice. There were mattresses on the bed or none. I think they were cot beds. Some down and some up.

MD: How was the food?

BA: Food was good. There were all kinds of food: meat, fish, potatoes and fruits. There was no milk, just plain water.

MD: Were only people in the ship?

BA: People coming to Hawaii. No cargos.

MD: What were your activities in the ship?

BA: Wandered around. Those that were dizzy just slept.

MD: Were there movies and dancing?

BA: At that time, we did not have those forms of recreation.

MD: How long was the voyage?

BA: One-month voyage.

MD: What did you feel about the voyage?

BA: The voyage was nice, but when we were in Honolulu, we were transferred to a small boat and I felt dizzy because the sea was rough. The reason for the transfer was the big ship was left in the ocean.

MD: Did anything happen in Honolulu when you arrived?

BA: None. We had an Ilocano nurse who inspected us.

MD: Did you go to the immigration [station], and what was done there?

BA: We went to check our papers. After that, they sent us here [Big Island]. That's why I said they transferred us to a small boat.

MD: When you boarded the small boat, did you know where you were bound to?

BA: To Hawaii [i.e., Big Island].

MD: How long did you stay in Honolulu?

BA: Not even one day. We did not sleep there.

MD: What did you think about Honolulu?

BA: Honolulu was nice. We were surprised to see plenty people giving us food like soda water and pastries. We were happy because they were giving us food.

MD: Where did you go in the Big Island?

BA: Mahukona Landing.

MD: How was the trip from Honolulu to Mahukona?

BA: The trip was rough. The waves were huge and I vomited.

MD: Why did you go to Kohala instead of other places?

BA: Because that was where we were assigned to go. Hawi, Kohala.

MD: When you arrived in Kohala, what did you think of Kohala?

BA: It was nice. We were surprised because all you see was sugarcane, trees (laughs) and some houses, too.

MD: Tell us about the condition of the place.

BA: In Kohala, it was windy. Nice people and nice houses. We were in Camp 5.

MD: About the houses?

BA: Low houses and nice. No flush toilets, only outhouses. Floor was wood and galvanized iron roof.

MD: What kinds of people were there when you arrived?

BA: Japanese, Koreans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese, only few Filipinos.

MD: How many Filipinos do you think?

BA: Less than 25. I don't know about the other camps.

MD: What was the name of the camp in Camp 5?

BA: It was Camp 5.

MD: Was there no other name?

BA: No other name, just Camp 5.

MD: What kind of work did your father do in Kohala?

BA: My father worked hō hana, cut cane, hāpai kō, loading cane, and I followed, too.

MD: Did you work also?

BA: Yes, I worked on Saturdays and Sundays because I went to school for one year. Saturdays and Sundays, I worked with my sister and we were paid 50 cents a day. My father was paid \$1.00, \$1.25.

MD: What were your working hours?

BA: We worked 6 [o'clock] a.m. to 3 [o'clock] p.m. My father, too.

MK: Do they do the same work like the father?

BA: My sister and I worked flume cane. We brought the cane to the mill. Sometimes we do hō hana.

MD: About the conditions at work?

BA: Nice, but you can't play hooky because the luna was watching you. No can rest.

MK: What kinds of people worked with you?

BA: Some Japanese, some Puerto Ricans, Filipinos.

MD: What kinds of food did you eat in the plantation?

BA: We ate codfish and tomatoes with the rice, dried iriko.

MD: What were your expenses in the plantation?

BA: Expenses on food, clothes.

MD: What were your relationships with the other workers?

BA: Good relationships. No quarrels.

MD: How do you feel about the work?

BA: I feel like crying but was forced to work because that's what we came here for. Our back were sore. The hō hana was hard. I cried, but there was nothing I could do. All kinds of work we have to be patient. We needed money, so we have to sacrifice.

MD: For recreation, what did you have?

BA: Sometimes I went to the movies with my sister and with other friends.

MD: How about radio?

BA: There were no radios.

MD: Phonograph?

BA: There were phonographs, but we did not have our own.

MD: Why did you stay in Kohala for only one year?

BA: We had to [move] because there was a strike at the plantation, and we were forced to join [the strikers].

MK: Why did you have to leave the plantation during the strike?

BA: Because the boss told us to leave. We were not allowed to stay in our house.

MK: Were they involved in the strike?

BA: We were involved because that's what the strike boss said [to do]. That's why we were to leave.

MD: What did you feel about the strike?

BA: It was hard--very hard.

MD: Can you remember the names of the strike leaders?

BA: Yes, the head was Pablo Manlapit. I don't know the others, but I remember he was the strike leader. But he was not showing up then.

MD: Your father was involved, too?

BA: Yes, he was involved. We all went to Hilo. Where we went, they followed us because we did not like to be separated.

MD: Were there troubles during the strike?

BA: Nothing happened to us. The others had fights, but we did not like to be involved. When there were fights, we moved away.

MD: How did you move to Hilo?

BA: We were loaded in a truck. I think the plantation sent us out because we were on strike.

MD: Did the plantation give you the truck?

BA: Yes, the plantation sent us the truck.

MD: How did you know that you were going to Hilo?

BA: We were following the other leaders.

MD: Were there plenty who left the plantation?

BA: The whole camp. Not only one plantation. Plenty left.

MD: Only the Filipinos left the plantation?

BA: Yes, only the Filipinos. But other plantations were not on strike.

MD: What were the plantations that struck?

BA: Kohala Union Mill; others may be Kauai or Maui. Not all struck.

MD: When did you marry?

BA: We were married in 1929 but were going together since 1924. I don't have to tell a lie because they will find out. And we had two children.

MD: How did you meet your husband?

BA: When we were working in the plantation, he was luna in Hawi. He comes to stay with me at work. He brings me to my ride and that's how we came to know each other. (Laughs)

MD: Did you live together by then?

BA: Yes, during the strike we were together in Hilo because we were in Hilo for eight months. We returned in 1925 to Kohala.

MD: What was your work in Hilo?

BA: I did not work. My husband worked at the wharf but [work] was not every day.

MD: How did you manage to live?

BA: Life was hard. We used up our savings. We were forced to return to Kohala because the strike was a failure.

MD: What kind of work did your husband do in Kohala when you went back?

BA: Plantation work like cut cane and hāpai kō.

MD: Why did he not return as luna?

BA: Because the boss won't let him be luna because he participated in the strike.

MD: What camp did you go back to in Kohala?

BA: Union Mill, Camp 5.

MD: How long were you there?

BA: Two years in Union Mill.

MK: What was her husband doing [in Hilo]?

BA: Stevedore.

MD: What was your work in Hilo?

BA: No work, no job.

MK: How did you survive in Hilo?

BA: Well, my husband went fishing. I went with him, and we bought some rice, and that's all.

MK: Where did you live in Hilo?

BA: One big building by the hotel now in Banyan Place near the beach.

MD: Reeds Bay?

BA: I don't know the name.

MK: Why did they have to leave Hilo?

BA: We left because it was hard on us. There was no money to buy food, so we returned to the plantation [that] we left before, Union Mill.

MK: This time, they returned to Camp 5?

BA: No, Union Mill. Camp 5 was the place we lived when we came from the Philippines.

MK: Why did they go to Union Mill and not Camp 5?

BA: Because my husband said that it's better. He chose the place he liked, but the same plantation.

MK: What makes him think it's better?

BA: I don't know.

SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MD: What was your husband's work in Kohala after you left Hilo?

BA: Hāpai kō, cut cane and loading cane.

MD: What part of Kohala?

BA: Union Mill.

MD: What were the houses like?

BA: Nice, but there was no inside toilet. The house was made of wood with galvanized iron roof. The inside was good. It was an old house.

MD: How much was your husband paid?

BA: One dollar twenty-five cents [\$1.25] a day.

MD: What were the hours of work?

BA: From 6 [o'clock] a.m. to 3 [o'clock] p.m.

MD: What was the condition of the work?

BA: It was good, but can't play because the luna was around. No can play hooky.

MD: When they were not working, what were the people's activities?

BA: Others go around, others go to chicken fights, others go fishing, others go to games.

MD: What celebrations were observed in the camp?

BA: Only New Year's and Christmas.

MD: Were there other activities the Filipinos do like birthdays?

BA: Others had birthdays, parties in commemoration of the dead, and marriages.

MD: What kinds of people lived in the camp?

BA: Nice people. Pākē, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, those were the people.

MD: How do you compare life in the Union Mill to that of Camp 5?

BA: I think the same. But Camp 5 was very windy.

MD: What foods did you eat?

BA: In Camp 5, our food consisted of food we bought, like bakalaw or if my father planted sweet potatoes, its top, or any food.

MD: How would you compare your life in Hilo to that in the plantations?

BA: Life was better in the plantations.

MD: Why?

BA: There were plenty food because my father planted foodstuffs. My father worked. We also worked and earned some money. In Hilo, there was no work for women.

MD: How would you compare life in the Philippines to that of your life in the plantations?

BA: Plantation life was better than life in the Philippines.

MD: Why?

BA: There was plenty food. When you get paid, the money can be exchanged to Philippine money twice. [U.S. currency could be exchanged with Philippine currency at a favorable rate of 1:2.]

MD: What was your work there?

BA: My sister and I worked with my father. No, no, I did not work in Camp 5 [later]. I was a housewife.

MD: In 1927 you came to Kona?

BA: Yes, for three months.

MD: Why did you come to Kona in 1927?

BA: We wanted to go because pay was higher here.

MD: What was meant by "go"?

BA: Means pick coffee. They were paying higher here than plantation.

MD: How did you know about Kona?

BA: We learned from other people coming from Kona that Kona was nice, so we tried.

MD: Who were those people?

BA: Our friends and neighbors from Kohala.

MD: When you planned to move to Kona, what did you expect in Kona?

- BA: I expected to find a good job, plenty food, and good climate.
- MD: What part of Kona did you move to?
- BA: Ma uka, the place of Komadre Catalina Estoy, was where we went. Her house was in Captain Cook, opposite from Felisa Alavado's [Felisa Alavado Balmores'] house. The place was very much elevated.
- MD: Tell us how the place looked like.
- BA: The place looked nice. It was cold, but the good thing was, we picked coffee every month and got paid every month.
- MD: Did you pick the whole year?
- BA: Yes, the whole year. As long as you took care the coffee, you picked every month.
- MD: Were there plenty people?
- BA: Not much people.
- MD: What kinds of people were there?
- BA: Batanes the most, others Tagalog, Japanese, but the Japanese went down because the place was high in elevation. We had to stay there because there was no other place for us to stay. We had to be patient.
- MD: What were the sources of income of the people there?
- BA: Only coffee.
- MD: What was the relationship among the people?
- BA: Good relationship. No quarrels. If there were celebrations, they come to enjoy. They helped when you have hardships with your work. If they asked for help, we got, too. We helped each other at that time.
- MD: How was the house that you lived?
- BA: The house was owned by komadre [Catalina Estoy]. Was nice, big, made of wood, galvanized iron roof and has a big water tank.
- MD: How many bedrooms were there?
- BA: There were two bedrooms, but the rooms were big.
- MD: How did you know about the house?
- BA: Because they came ahead of us to Kona, we went to stay with them.

Also, the house was big.

MD: Where did they come from?

BA: We came from the same plantation. They were ahead of us to Kona, and they built the house.

MD: Did you pay rent?

BA: We did not pay rent because we were the mahina men. We helped with the work, but we were paid.

MD: Did you have neighbors?

BA: There were not much neighbors. Her brother [Catalina Estoy's brother], Felisa's parents [Felisa Balmores' parents], plus other Visayans, but houses were apart.

MD: Who did you work for?

BA: We worked for Komadre Catalina. After one year with them, my husband thought of planting coffee, so we leased two acres of forest land. We cleaned the place and we planted coffee. When the coffee grew, we built a small house like a garage because we wanted to be on our own. The kitchen was small. The water tank could hold only 50 gallons of water, enough to take the contents of one barrel. Patiently, we lived there. What was good was, there was a freshwater spring near our house, about one mile, and that was where we took water for wash and bath.

MD: Let's talk about the first three months you came to Kona. Did you pick only for one coffee farmer?

BA: No, we did not pick for Komadre Catalina. We picked for a Japanese farmer. We stayed in their house.

MD: How did you know about this Japanese farmer?

BA: Because we have been hearing about coffee picking plus the Japanese farmer paid good, we went to work for him.

MD: How about the Estoy farm?

BA: Not yet. When we went to Estoy place, we did not anymore return to the plantation.

MD: When you came from Kohala, you said you only stayed three months in Kona.

BA: Yes. Union Mill was where we came from when we came to pick coffee for three months.

MD: How did you know about Kona?

BA: There were many friends who has been picking coffee in Kona.

MD: What part of Kona?

BA: There was one farmer they called Honda. He had a place. That's where we stayed. [BA stayed at the Honda farm during her first three-month stay in Kona; she stayed with the Estoys later just prior to leasing their own place.]

MD: What place?

BA: Around Machado.

MD: Is that Kaawaloa?

BA: I think it's Kaawaloa.

MD: How did you know about the place?

BA: We learned the place from Komadre Rosario Calma. We lived with them [at the Honda farm] because that's where they were living. She was married by then.

MD: Where was the house located?

BA: Because they were making parchment, there was a small house under the dryer.

MD: Did you work for only one farmer?

BA: Yes, just one, only Honda.

MD: How much did Honda pay you?

BA: We were paid a bag of coffee picked for \$1.00, \$1.25.

MD: How come the pay was high sometimes?

BA: It was high sometimes because there were less berries to pick. If there were more, the pay gets lower.

MD: After coffee picking, what did you do?

BA: After coffee picking, we returned to Kohala.

MD: When you were picking coffee, were there other jobs?

BA: None.

MD: That work was full time or part-time?

- BA: It was contract. They paid what we picked.
- MD: How many hours did you pick?
- BA: If you want to fill up plenty bags, you start 6 [o'clock] a.m. and go home 6 [o'clock] p.m.
- MD: Were there days you did not work?
- BA: Yes, only on Sundays.
- MD: How many bags do you pick a day?
- BA: On the first day, my husband and I picked one bag because we did not know about picking coffee. Eventually, we picked a bag each day.
- MD: Was there a set number of bags you have to pick every day?
- BA: None. Pick what you can.
- MD: How many months was that?
- BA: Three months.
- MD: What was the condition? Did you have to rent the house?
- BA: No, it was free. It was a pitiful house.
- MD: How about the light?
- BA: There was no electric light.
- MD: Water?
- BA: Water was free.
- MD: What light did you use?
- BA: Lantern.
- MD: What were the foods you eat?
- BA: The foods we could buy. We bought the cheap foods like bakalaw and iriko, and mixed with vegetables, bagoong or shōyu.
- MD: Was the coffee farm big?
- BA: It was a big coffee farm.
- MD: How many acres?

- BA: I think it was more than 10 acres or 12.
- MD: Were there other people who picked with you?
- BA: There were, plus the children of the farmer.
- MD: Who were the other pickers?
- BA: Filipinos and Hawaiians.
- MD: When you first came to pick coffee in Kona, were there plenty people?
- BA: There are plenty, not much.
- MD: Filipino?
- BA: Not much.
- MD: How much?
- BA: I think about 30 in number.
- MD: What do you think of your three months' work in coffee?
- BA: It was nice.
- MD: If you picked coffee, were you assigned sections or what?
- BA: We were given lines. The owner came to check if there were plenty green [coffee] berries that had fallen or if we did not pick up the red berries on the ground. He told us to pick everything. If you hooked the branch and didn't return it, you were asked to return it. He checked up everything. He did not want plenty leaves to come out of the branches.
- MD: Were you supposed to finish the lines?
- BA: You were to finish the lines. If you don't finish in one day, continue the following day.
- MD: How would you compare your coffee land work at Honda's to the other places you worked like Hilo and the plantations.
- BA: I think the work there [Honda coffee farm] was better because you work standing. In the plantation, hō hana is a hard job.
- MD: Describe how you eat at the coffee farm.
- BA: The other coffee pickers and us group together. We shared each other's food.

MD: How were your relationships with the other coffee pickers?

BA: We had a very good relationship.

MD: For recreation, what did you do?

BA: We joked, played sakura [cards] and others.

MD: When do you play sakura?

BA: Only nights. When we were tired, we did not have time to play sakura.

MD: How were you paid?

BA: Cash.

MD: Was it weekly or monthly?

BA: After the [picking] round [after all the ripe coffee on the trees were picked. Since all coffee berries do not ripen at the same time, there are several rounds of picking.]

MD: Were you given baskets?

BA: No, all our needs to pick, we provided. Only, if you don't have hook, [to lower tall coffee branches] the farmer loan us.

MD: Did you do other work for the farmer aside from picking coffee?

BA: No, we did only picking coffee because that was our only purpose.

MD: What other things did you do with the other pickers aside picking coffee?

BA: Sometimes we played sakura, talked.

MD: How many were living in the house?

BA: There were four because two of us, plus Komadre Rosario [Calma] and her husband.

MD: Was the house you lived near the farmer's home?

BA: Yes, it was near.

MD: Was it also near the coffee farm?

BA: Yes, we lived near.

MD: What were your happy times when you were picking coffee?

BA: If the coffee prices were high, we were happy because most years, the price was low.

MD: Do you remember when prices were high?

BA: I don't know because it was only a three-months' period.

MD: Was it hard to find a place to pick coffee? Why?

BA: It was easy. There were people and coffee farmers who wanted pickers so their crop will be picked.

MD: How would you know that a farmer needed pickers?

BA: Our friends would tell us.

MD: What other things do you do while picking coffee?

BA: We were talking stories. Others concentrated on picking coffee.

MD: Did you play cards?

BA: If we picked coffee, we picked coffee. There were no other things we did.

MD: Was there anybody to supervise you?

BA: No, but sometimes the farmer checked the bags if they were properly filled, or plenty green berries, or leaves fall.

MD: How many bags were you expected to pick a day?

BA: They expected us to pick two or three bags if there were plenty ripe berries.

MD: Two or three bags each person?

BA: Yes, some could pick four bags.

MK: How about you, how many bags can you pick?

BA: Well, when I was strong, I picked four bags, three, but my husband before [picked] five, and some of my children, five, four, three.

MD: What was the best thing you liked about coffee picking?

BA: I wanted picking coffee very much because you have to stand up. Hō hana is backbreaking.

MK: What was the worst part of the job in coffee?

BA: Hō hana, cut branch.

MK: Why is it?

BA: Because you have to use your muscle. If the branch is big, you have to chop it and pile them in one place.

MK: If you compare plantation work from coffee, which do you like better?

BA: Well, I like coffee because we were used to already and we liked it. If the coffee price is good, we liked it.

MK: In the plantation, you lived in the camp; in the coffee, not. Which do you like better, the camp life-style or coffee picking?

BA: Coffee picking, because, you know, we used to. The way we feel, the job is lighter than the plantation.

MK: You know, in the plantation, you have to wear working clothes. What kinds of clothes do you wear to pick coffee?

BA: We have to wear the same working clothes.

MK: What kind working clothes?

BA: You know, denim or the thin kind, what you call that?

MD: Chambray.

BA: Yes, chambray.

MD: Like plantation, you have to get boots.

BA: Hats, gloves.

MD: You have to use that also?

BA: In Kona, we don't have to. Well, if you have to pull grass and cut branch, we have to use gloves because sometimes the branch was rough and it will hurt your hand and fingers. Or if you missed, the sickle will cut your hand, so that's a protection.

MK: If you try to find job to pick coffee, did you go to farmers who can pay more?

BA: No, we don't do that. If only we hear that person was paying more, we go ask if we can pick for them.

MK: So if you find somebody paying more, you go see him?

BA: Yes.

MD: Why did you return to Kohala?

BA: We were forced to return because we left some of my children with my parents who cared for them. We planned only to pick up the kids but were unable to return right away. We stayed there for a few months, and we returned again in 1929.

MD: How many months were you there? A year?

BA: Not one year.

MD: When you returned to Kohala, what kind of work did you do?

BA: The same. My husband cut cane and loaded cane.

MD: How about you?

BA: I was a housewife and washed clothes for some workers. One person a month, I got paid two dollars. I patiently did it because during the time, life was hard.

MD: What part of Kohala did you go?

BA: Kohala proper.

MD: What plantation?

BA: Kohala plantation. You know, there were also Union Mill and Hawi. This was called Kohala Plantation.

MD: What camp?

BA: They called it Japanese Camp, below the mill.

MD: Was it Niulii?

BA: No, it was not Niulii. Below the mill, it was a Japanese camp.

MK: Why did you return to Kohala?

BA: Because we left our son--he was small--with my mother. She babysat for us while we came to pick coffee, so after the coffee, we went back again and stayed there for a few months.

MK: The plantation, they don't mind you going back?

BA: No, no. That was not nice, but my husband wanted to go back.

MD: What kind of work did he do when he returned?

BA: The same, cut cane and hāpai kō.

MD: What kinds of houses were there?

- BA: Nice houses. Galvanized iron roof. House was made of wood. Only they were old.
- MD: Which did you make more money, coffee or plantation?
- BA: You make more money in coffee.
- MD: Why?
- BA: Because my husband was a good picker, plus I could help. We could pick together.
- MK: What were their expenses?
- BA: Well, expenses, we could handle.
- MD: Which do you spend more on food, plantation work or coffee work?
- BA: There were less expenses in coffee work because there were plenty food that we don't have to buy.
- MK: Why free?
- BA: Because the banana, avocado and mango were growing around, that's how we were living. But in the plantation, no more. There were few bananas but plenty people there and if you go last, you cannot get.
- MD: Were there differences between the other plantations and that of the Kohala Plantation?
- BA: The differences were that in Kohala, there were more people and more friends to talk to, and the houses were better.
- MD: How about the pay?
- BA: Pay was the same.
- MD: How about the recreations?
- BA: There were more recreations. People celebrated Rizal Day, Christmas, birthdays, and marriages.
- MD: How about the other plantations?
- BA: There were not much of those activities because there were few people, like Union Mill and Camp 5. Most of the people live in Kohala.
- MD: The three months you lived at Honda's, what were your recreations?
- BA: There were none, except that we played sakura [cards] sometimes.

We were tired, so we rested at night. Early in the morning, we picked as soon as we saw the coffee.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 9-35-2-80

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Bernabella Abril (BA)

December 21, 1980

Middle Ke'ei, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Michiko Kodama (MK) and Modesto Daranciang (MD)

[NOTE: A portion of this interview was conducted in Ilocano. Translation was done by Modesto Daranciang.]

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Bernabella Abril at her home in Middle Ke'ei, Kona, Hawaii on December 21, 1980.

MD: Mrs. Abril, why did you leave Kohala and come to Kona in 1929?

BA: Being on the plantation, the pay was so cheap, so I came back to Kona.

MD: Where did you come back to in Kona?

BA: [BA and family] came back to Captain Cook.

MD: How did you decide to come back to Captain Cook?

BA: I heard about the place from Komadre Catalina Estoy, and we heard that the pay for coffee was good.

MK: How does she know Mrs. Catalina [Estoy]?

MD: How did you know Mrs. Estoy?

BA: We came from the same plantation [Kohala Plantation].

MD: What did you plan to do in Kona?

BA: We came to pick coffee.

MK: That time, how much were they being paid per bag?

MD: That time, how much were you being paid per bag?

BA: Uno quarter. One dollar, twenty-five cents--one bag.

MK: How did that compare with the pay you were getting in the plantation?

MD: How did pay for picking coffee compare with pay on the plantation?

BA: It was better at this time to pick coffee because I help pick coffee with my husband, and between the two of us we can pick two bags or three bags. One bag.

[Interviewing in Ilocano ends. Remainder of interview conducted in English.]

MK: And so, if they are making two or three bags in one day . . .

BA: That is \$3.75.

MK: And how much were you making on the plantation, one day?

BA: Well, one day, my husband just work one dollar quarter [\$1.25] one day [at Kohala Plantation]. And I cannot go, because, you know, I have to stay home and do some housework. Maybe I can just wash clothes for somebody else, and that help, too, for the family. But so cheap, you know. Only two dollars one month for one person. And the clothes is so dirty because, you know, carry sugarcane, all dirty, so. But we have to take 'em because that's the only way we can earn money for buy food.

MK: Those days, even when you were on the sugar plantation, you had some of your [16] children already, yeah?

BA: Oh, yes. I had two--two of them.

MK: And then, when you came to Kona . . .

BA: Then, most all of them born here.

MK: If you have children, back then, how did you manage to pick coffee, too, if you have children that time?

BA: (BA talks to daughter.) Oh, well, you explain, my daughter. She is the next mother of me [i.e., substitute mother].

BA's daughter: (Laughs) I stay home every day . . .

BA: She stay home and take care of the children. And if not, I bring them all into the coffee land and bring some kind of bag. Put them over there. Or da kine cradle. (Phrase inaudible) Yeah, and put the smallest one over there, and I help my husband. The oldest one watch the small one.

MK: Those days, from what time in the morning to what time did you pick coffee with your husband?

BA: Oh, well, we have to go early, as soon as we can see the coffee. And if we go home, we have to go home late, too. [And] yeah, the house which we live, that's not so bad, you know.

MK: How big was it, and what kind of condition was it?

BA: Like this lumber, but no more ceiling--oh, no, get ceiling because on top they dry coffee, so get ceiling. In those days, we had to grind coffee [by hand]. Two big room [the house], but big, you know. They just half the whole house.

BA's daughter: It's a plain house. Plain.

BA: Just two. But kitchen is big, so we all share.

MK: You mean, different families shared the one kitchen?

BA: Yeah, yeah. Mrs. Catalina Estoy was there, but we have to cook our own.

MD: Oh, you folks shared the kitchen only?

BA: Yeah, only the kitchen, but . . .

MD: But the bedroom--no?

BA: No. One room is for them, and one for us.

MD: So, you lived in one bedroom?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], mm hmm. Only, only one bedroom for the whole family. Oh, pity, you know. We all sleep on the floor, no bed.

MK: The house that you lived in, that was provided by the farmer, huh?

BA: Mm hmm [yes]. After that. . . . No, I think we bought already [from] Mrs. Estoy that place [That time] no, not yet. . . . Libre, yeah. We not paying rent. That's provided for us, because we help to work the coffee land.

MK: So, what else did the farmer provide to you folks?

BA: Well, nothing. Only the house.

MD: How about the light and the water?

BA: No, we have to pay our own. You know, all included. No electricity. We have to use lamp, only. Kerosene lamp.

MK: And that time, were you picking only for Mrs. Estoy's family?

BA: Yeah, that time.

MK: How come you didn't go to another place and ask if there's some coffee to pick?

BA: No, no. My husband said that he think to plant his coffee land, so we lease [from] Hawaii Bank [i.e., Bank of Hawaii] two acres. Then, we start to plant, plant. But we still yet [in] Mrs. Estoy's house. And after, maybe, one year, we plant coffee, and we made our own house. But we still picking yet to them [Estoys] because our coffee not . . .

MK: Not producing?

BA: . . . not produce, yet.

MK: And how many acres was that farm that you opened?

BA: Just two acres, at least. Yeah, just two acres starting, you know. Because we have to go outside, work for our food. We cannot just stay only take care of that land, because we no more money for buy, you know? We just go outside work and plant. Worked our own land. And I have to plant vegetables. Any kind vegetables for eat. Taro, yam, potato, and any kind of vegetables. And plant banana, avocado, everything.

MK: Those days, you said that you leased the land from . . .

BA: Bishop---no, not Bishop. Hawaii Bank [i.e., Bank of Hawaii].

MK: How much was the lease?

BA: Two dollars, only, before. And two years, free, you know. They just let us clean [clear the land], first, and then when get something already produce for food, then we start to pay two dollars, one acre. So cheap, eh? Yeah.

MK: Oh, was two dollars, one acre?

BA: Mm hmm [yes]. Before.

MK: For how many years was that?

BA: Well, when we get plenty produce already, each time they raise 'em to five, to ten [dollars], like that, already.

MK: You said that you cleared the land--you opened the land, yeah?

BA: Mm hmm [yes]. We open! And, before, no bulldozer. My husband used to dig all the guava with all the roots. And we have to cut, cut that; pile up; and burn 'em after it dried. After that, we plant any kind of foods, and coffee, like that.

MK: Where did you get all the coffee seedlings?

BA: Well, we have to go---my husband have to go ask to the friends that had. They grow, you know, under the coffee land, and pull the small kind like this [seedling], and we plant.

MK: How about for your other vegetables? Where did you get the seeds?

BA: Some of our friends that have, we have to ask [them for seeds]. Because some of them, first over here already, and they had that kind fruits. We have to ask and plant. And then, each time, we had, [we] plant. And plant more, and more, and more. That's what we had and start to plant. Especially the taro. Oh, we have to ask for [taro planting material from] somebody else. Because we no more.

MK: And so, the seedlings, and the seeds, and the starting material for your vegetables, you can get from your friends, yeah?

BA: Friends, yes. That's right.

MK: How [about] the equipment? Those days, no more bulldozer, but you had . . .

BA: No more. Well, we use just pick, and sickle, and hoe. That's all.

MK: Where did you get that from?

BA: From the store. Then they have--they sold those.

MK: What store did you go to?

BA: Oh, well, was that Machado Store. They selling. And some other kind store.

MK: Those days, how did you pay for your hoe, and your sickle . . .

BA: Oh, so cheap. One hoe is dollar quarter [\$1.25]; the pick is \$2.50. (Laughs) So cheap, in those days.

MK: And those days, when you buy that from Machado Store, you pay cash, or . . .

BA: He [BA's husband] should pay cash. We have to pay cash. That's why, if we have some plant that we cannot eat, we have to go out and sell those. We could use that for our materials and especially, the foods. Because, main, the foods for the children. And we have to. . . .

MK: When you sold your vegetables, where did you sell your vegetables?

BA: To the stores, to some other people--family people. Japanese people or some other people.

MK: In those days, most families, they plant vegetables or they buy?

BA: Oh, well, some of them buy, but the one we selling, they don't have, so they buy. Especially the yam and taro. Some people, they not planting. They like it, so they buy 'em. We happy because we had money for buy foods for the children.

MK: Those days, you were saying, you were picking coffee for the Estoys; and you were growing vegetables--you sell some of your vegetables; and your coffee wasn't producing, yet, yeah?

BA: Well, just little. Start . . .

MK: Just little? So, from all your three different places that you got your money--from the coffee picking, the little coffee you had on your land, and your vegetables--which one was most important?

BA: Most plenty money to come in, you say? Well, we go outside [pick coffee for others]. It's better because I can help him. We can pick three or four bags already. We kinda long time, and we know how to pick better, so sometime we pick four bags, five. It helps, you know.

MK: When you first began your coffee farm, when you opened it, who worked on the farm?

BA: We work! My husband and me work hard. I work hard, too, you know.

MK: And the children?

BA: The children, when they big, they help. They not playing. They had to work. They go school. After school, they have to pick coffee, help us everything in the farm.

MK: Those days, on your coffee farm, did you already have a platform?

BA: No, no, no. We have to go somebody else for grind and for dry.

MK: Who did you go to, then?

BA: Mrs. [Catalina] Estoy. Mrs. Estoy.

MK: And so, to use her platform, what did you do? Did you have to pay, or . . .

BA: Well, we pay a little. But sometime, we cannot leave there till [BA's coffee] dry, because they had coffee, too, you know. So, we have to bring 'em home, and we spread bag, and dry our own.

MK: So, you know, the real early years when you just open up your farm, about how much coffee did you get from the farm the first four years?

- BA: Well, starting, sometime two bags, three bags, five. And each time, come plenty. You know? Yeah.
- MK: So, it was little in the beginning?
- BA: Little, little, little.
- MK: That time, when you opened your coffee farm, where were you living?
- BA: No, we build house already. Small house. One small [house]--just like garage. Oh, so pity, you know. Small garage.
- MK: So, where did you get all your building material for your house?
- BA: Oh, well, my husband have to go down to the store. They have nails and lumber--the cheap kind lumber. You know, second-hand lumber. That's the only way we could do so we can have house for us. Have to buy the cheapest lumber.
- MK: Who built the house?
- BA: Well, him and some of his friends help him. Because not the kind special kind. Just like rest of us. Easy to build, you know. And the roof, just like this.
- MK: Flat?
- BA: Flat, flat. And the kitchen is so small. And our tank is so small, just one big barrel. Fifty gallon water.
- MK: Oh, so, those days had plenty water tanks, yeah?
- BA: Yeah, before, but we cannot afford because we just starting, so we have to go for the cheapest kind. After that, my husband buy one more, so we have two already. But lucky thing, because near our place we had just like spring water, you know. But over one mile from our house. We have to go over there, wash clothes; sometime, pack water. We use to wash dish or the children bathe, like that. That's the only way we had to. . . .
- MK: Those days, if you travel over one mile, how was that?
- BA: Oh, it's kinda hard, and the road is all grassy.
- MK: So, those days, you were still using donkey?
- BA: Oh, yes. We have donkey.
- MK: And how many donkeys did you folks have?
- BA: We had one before. And after that, the coffee is coming plenty, and then my husband bought one more jackass. They call "jackass."

So, we had two.

MK: For the donkey, you had to buy . . .

BA: Yes, you buy. Yeah, we had to buy the donkey.

MK: Those days, how much was the donkey?

BA: I think my husband bought our donkey, \$25. Yeah, \$25 (laughs), I think so. Twenty-five dollars. But strong. They really so strong.

MK: Your daughter, right now, said that when they were small, they used to help carry the coffee?

BA: Oh, yes. They have to. They have to carry the coffee. Yeah, they have to carry.

MK: And the donkey used to carry some, too?

BA: Carry, too. And all the children carry coffee. Especially when we grind our coffee (at) Mrs. Estoy [place], and they let us take away, because they use, too, the farm. We have to bring 'em [BA's coffee] home, and everybody have to go pack, and bring 'em our house, and spread 'em by our ground with only bags, now. We have to sew the bags and spread all the coffee over that. And hard. Really hard life.

MK: And then, your daughter was saying when it rained, how was it?

BA's daughter: We have to rush before the rain.

BA: Oh, yes. If the rain, oh, everybody have to rush, you know, fold the coffee in the ground. Fold 'em up quick, and take 'em in, and cover 'em up again over there.

MK: So, those days, what was the hardest thing about coffee farming?

BA: Well, the hardest part is for grind, and you wash. Ho, my husband, he really get hard time, you know. They put 'em in a big [container] Oh, the starting, we don't have to bring 'em yet in the mill--no, [we took the coffee to] Mrs. Estoy--because just few bags. So, we have to pound 'em by ourself, you know.

MK: You pounded the coffee by hand?

BA: Mm hmm [yes]. The coffee. Maybe two bags, pound 'em. If not, the children help us, just press 'em like this [between two fingers].

MD: Squeeze?

BA: Squeeze 'em. The whole night, we have to do that, and oh, sometime, "Oh, my God," I stay thinking. But we have to do that because we

need the coffee because we need the money for pay food and everything we need. When it come plenty, then we have to bring 'em to Mrs. Estoy already to grind.

MK: So, those days, no more pulper? You did it all by hand?

BA: All by hand.

MK: How long did it take you folks to do just one bag?

BA: How long take, now? How long it takes, one bag? She knows, because they helping us, you know.

[BA and daughters discuss question.]

BA: One day, maybe, for two bags. One day. And if really, our fingers tired, we take one bucket and hit 'em [the coffee], pound 'em. More fast.

MK: And then, the children used to sort it?

BA: Oh, yes. Everybody have to help and sorts that.

MK: You know, other families that didn't have as many children or as grown-up children as you, how were they doing all this kind of work?

BA: Well, I don't know what they doing to theirs, but the way how we do ours, the children help us. I say that we have to pound 'em, whether they tired already.

MK: What was the easiest thing about coffee farming?

BA's daughter: Picking.

BA: (Laughs) Picking is the easiest, I guess so. Because you just stand up, and, you know. That's the only easiest way.

MK: By 1934, your coffee was producing more and more, yeah? That time, did you hire any pickers?

BA: No, no, no. Only me and my husband and the children.

MK: Never hired your pickers, then?

BA: No, no.

MK: And those days, after you pick your coffee, did you have a drying platform and pulper by 1934?

BA: [Nineteen] thirty-four was. . . .

- BA: [In 1934], Mrs. Estoy, we going over there for dry.
- MK: Still yet?
- BA: Yeah, still yet, over there. We have to go over there because we no more platform.
- MK: Not yet?
- BA: Not yet.
- MK: So, those days, you go to Mrs. Estoy's place; you dry . . .
- BA: Dry and grind.
- MK: And grind over there? And then, where did you sell your coffee?
- BA: To the mill.
- MK: Which mill?
- BA: Where is this mill already? They call that Hawaii [Coffee] Mill, you know. Hawaii Mill. If not, [Yoshio] Noguchi. You know that. . . . Noguchi, eh, they call, yeah?
- MK: Oh, Noguchi was the miller?
- BA: Yeah. He just buy the already clean-up coffee.
- MK: And those days, how did the miller buy the coffee?
- BA: Well, they making money because they buy from us little bit cheaper. You know, that's what they do now. They buy, and then they sell [for] more money [when] time for sell.
- MK: Did you take the coffee down to Mr. Noguchi's place or did he come?
- BA: No, we have to bring down. My husband had to ask some of his friends that have donkey to help him pack and bring down the coffee there.
- MK: Do you remember the prices, back then?
- BA: Oh, no. Some, I remember, the highest price, \$18, one bag, in those days. Eighteen dollars, the highest price. Eighteen dollars, only.
- MK: How come, those days, you just went to Mr. Noguchi? Why didn't you go somewhere else--another miller?
- BA: Well, sometime my husband going to the place that he heard that is better price. Maybe one time he sold to Noguchi or two time, I

guess so. Then, he always give to [Hawaii] Coffee Mill already.

MK: That time, huh?

BA: Mm hmm [yes].

MK: And those days, you were drying and you were selling, yeah? Sometimes, nowadays, people just sell the cherry, yeah?

BA: Oh, now time, most of the people do that. Just pick and bring 'em to the road, which the bus can pack and bring 'em to the mill. Because more easy. Because the way I tell you, how to us, coffee is so hard, you know. Washing coffee so hard.

MK: Then, how come you folks didn't sell your cherry?

BA: Before? Because nobody---they not opening at the mill, before time.

MK: So, there weren't any buyers looking for cherry coffee?

BA: No. No, no, no. No more, before. Only now time.

MK: And then, by that time--by 1934--you had more and more coffee, yeah? So, for your income--you know, to survive--what were you depending on mostly? Your coffee?

BA: Coffee.

MK: Your coffee? Not too much on your vegetables already?

BA: Not anymore. Only use [the vegetables at] home already.

MK: Only for home use, not selling already?

BA: Mm hmm [yes].

MK: How about picking? You still go to Mrs. Estoy's and . . .

BA: Not anymore. We not going outside anymore, because the coffee is real plenty already. So, we not going to anybody else to pick.

MK: And then, four years later, 1938, you took over the Estoy's farm, yeah?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], that's right. Then, we had the machine and platform already and bigger house. Then, that's the place we stay long.

MK: How did you get the Estoy's farm?

BA: You know why? Before time, if you don't want your place, you can just leave 'em, you know, without any paying, because you no like

it. Yeah. That's what happened. Mrs. Estoy leave that place and, oh, we need it. Because my children are plenty, and bigger house, and they get already machine like that. And the land is big, too. So, we took that place. Maybe my husband bin buy. I don't know if he bin give money for that or what.

MK: Do you know why Mrs. Estoy's family left the farm?

BA: You know, they took place [in] Captain Cook and it's better, they said. They like better over there. That's what they told us. I don't know what's the reason.

MK: So when you took over, you took over the house that the Estoy's were living in?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], mm hmm.

MK: You took over the drying platform and pulper?

BA: Yes, machine.

MK: And you took over all the land?

BA: All the land.

MK: How much land did the Estoy's have?

BA: Maybe four acres, I think. Four acres or six, like that, no, Anna [BA's daughter]?

BA's daughter: Yeah, about that.

BA: About that. Maybe six or four [acres]; like that.

MK: So, in total, you were having, maybe, six to eight acres, yeah?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], mm hmm. Already, with my own, now--the one we bin plant.

MK: And then, during those days, how did you manage to do all the work on the farm?

BA: Well, the kids are biggy. They growing big and they help us so hard. Real, me and my husband work hard.

MK: But the children, they are going to school, huh?

BA: They going to school. After school, they come home; they have to go pick coffee. Maybe one basket or two. After that, eat dinner and they work their lesson, eh?

MK: And who was doing all the drying and the pulping?

BA: I do. My husband do the washing, I do the drying. You know, because you have to work all the time. I do.

MK: How did you get your children to do the helping?

BA: Well, my husband had to hustle them. Because, you know, "You have to help us so we can get something. We alive." That's why, they learn hard to work. They go school and they work hard.

MK: All of them, that time, how many years of school did they finish, by the time all your children grew up?

BA: How many children, you mean to say? Well, I get 16 children. And how many over there wen graduate? Maybe ten, I guess so.

MK: Ten of them? They all graduate?

BA: Yeah, ten. Yeah, ten, no, Anna, I wonder, of you?

[BA and daughter discuss question.]

MK: Among the 16 children, how many of you finished high school? When you look back? Out of the 16?

BA: Oh, I just say ten.

MK: About ten? So, mostly, they go to school and they were helping, yeah?

BA: Mm hmm [yes].

MK: Those days, 1930s, was depression time, huh?

BA: Ah, sure. So hard.

MK: The prices were going down?

BA: So down. And we picking coffee from somebody, just [got] 50 cents [to pick] one bag. Some, 75 cents. But we have to work because that's the only way we can live. Nobody else can, you know. We have to.

MK: You were picking coffee?

BA: Mm hmm [yes]. I do pick coffee.

MK: You went outside and you picked coffee?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], mm hmm.

BA's daughter: All of us.

BA: All of us. But this girl have to stay because she has to watch the smaller one. So, me and my husband and the rest of kids have to pick coffee.

MK: Those days, when prices are coming down, did you folks ever consider leaving Kona?

BA: [BA mishears question.] Oh, yes. We just like, because we stay here already. No place else to go. We just love Kona. Everything is here, most free. You know, fruits, like that. You plant, and you don't have to buy.

MK: So, in 1930s, even when the prices were coming down, you were working outside?

BA: We had to. Yeah, we had to work. We no care how hard. We have to.

MK: And then, after the depression times, World War II came, yeah?

BA: Oh, 1940, eh?

MK: [Nineteen] forty-one, yeah?

BA: Yeah, '41, yes.

MK: War with Japan started, yeah? What happened to your family during World War II?

BA: Oh, well, so sad, you know. Everybody had to work, too. We worked the same way, but some of them, they really scared. "Oh, where we going, Ma, if the enemy come over?"

And my husband said, "Well, I join the Hawaii Rifle [local militia]." He joined, you know.

I tell him, "Why you join? And the children, what I going do with them?"

"Well, that's my duty. I have to. But I tell you folks. If the enemy come over, you folks just go in the mountain," he tell me.

"Oh, no," I tell. (Laughs) I just real worried, you know. And I tell, "Yeah. Well, if that's the way, we do what you said."

And I have to plant any kind, too, because that time, no more rice. They all lock up the rice. They give us only few pound. So, we have to start to plant more foods.

MK: How much more foods did you plant? How much more land did you plant in food?

BA: Oh, the same, the same. But we have to plant more in between the coffee. Taro, like that. Most taro and yam.

MK: Those days, World War II, there were many restrictions, yeah? What kind of restrictions did you have in Kona?

BA: They give us gas mask, you know. Wherever you go, you have to use that. Bring always with you.

MK: Anything else? Like, what time did you have to come home?

BA: Yeah, they do that. You don't have to go away far. You have to come home early. Don't have to go anyplace, like that. And what they call "blackout." You don't have to use light. You have to turn off your light at night. So, that's what we do.

MK: Those days, World War II time, how were your relationships with all the different kinds of people?

BA: Well, just like, we have to be friend to each other. So, if something happen, wherever they go, you have to go. Whatever you have, you have to share. Not only by yourself, you know. We have to share.

MK: By that time, World War II, quite a few Filipinos, yeah, in Kona side?

BA: Not much, yet, you know.

MK: Not much? About how many, you think, were?

BA: How many, I guess, for the Filipino? Maybe 50, I think so, I know.

MK: In your area? Fifty families?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], mm hmm. No more, in fact, 50. No more [that many], in fact. Maybe 25, I guess so. If you say the houses.

MK: Those days, where did most of the Filipino families come from? Ilocano or Visayan?

BA: Oh, Visayas, most. And each time, the Ilocano people come, too. Yeah, Visaya, Tagalog people, most.

MK: Those days, how did the Visayan people get along with the Ilocano people?

BA: Well, they had to come. Maybe if they don't have the things you have, they ask, maybe, [for] some [of] the one you plant, like that. Maybe, if they need help, they ask for your help. And you have to [help], you know.

MK: How about 1930s, 1940s time. What did the Filipino people do

together as a group? Like, your daughter just mentioned cockfight. Those days, had cockfight?

BA: They do. Some of them, they do. But most, I don't think it's Ilocano. Maybe some of them join, too, that group. But most the Visayan people do. And the other, Tagalog, maybe. They love cockfights and another kind gambling. But my husband no care. Ah, he no like. He tell me, "Oh, before, I was single, I love to join those people. But not now, anymore, because I have family. I have to work for that family." So, I happy, because we all work together at the farm. He no care going someplace else.

MK: What did you folks do when you had a little bit extra time? What did you do to relax?

BA: Sometime, we play games, like that--sakura [cards]. Or sometime, he go fishing. My husband go fishing. Yeah, he go fishing, find food most of the time. He not that kind go all the time around and waste time. Better go find some foods for the children then, you know.

MK: Nowadays, I hear that the Filipinos around here belong to the Filipino Community Association. And sometimes, they have big celebrations or they celebrate saints' holidays.

BA: Yeah, the Rizal Day.

MK: How about before?

BA: Before, some, they do that, but we are not joining them. Because my husband no care. He said, "It's better (tsk) I do my own work." He no care for joining those kind club.

MK: You continued coffee farm long time . . .

BA: Mm [yes]! All the time. No stop the coffee. Just coffee--the farming.

MK: Eventually, 1958, you moved to Captain Cook side?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], already.

MK: And you bought . . .

BA: Bought the store. Yes, we do.

MK: Who did you buy the store from?

BA: Akana. They call the Chinese man "Akana."

MK: And then, for how much?

BA: Oh, how much? Maybe \$3,000, I guess so. Three thousand, because not much inside [the store]. Only we like the house, too, because big. And we can come down [from ma uka]. Because up there is so far from [the school and other places for] the kids, you know. That's what we like. So the kids near to the school and everything else near from us. That's why we forced to buy that place.

MK: Oh, so you bought the store so that you could have a house to live in on the Captain Cook side?

BA: Mm hmm, mm hmm. Yes, yes. That's right.

MK: The store, you bought for \$3,000?

BA: Around that, maybe.

MK: How did you get the \$3,000?

BA: Well, you know, we producing coffee up there. I tell you, eh? We save little by little when we had [been] paid, so we just pay little by little to that old man. Five hundred [dollars], every year. So, he help us, too. Because we never [have] cash that [time]. "If you don't have cash, you just pay me this much. Then, you have to take [some money], so your family can live here." He a good old man, you know. He pity the children. Yeah, he pity the children.

MK: So, you bought the store. What did the store have in it when you bought it?

BA: Oh, any kind foods. Most groceries. And some kind clothing--old kind clothes, shoes, slipper. And pots. And any kind Chinese kind.

MK: What did you sell in the store? The same kind of things that were in it already?

BA: Well, if the grocery part, we have to buy again. We have to order. Who this in Hilo, company?

MK: What company did you buy your . . .

BA: Hata Store. And how many. . . . Three, I think, company, we buy [from]. I forget the rest.

MK: And then, who worked in the store?

BA: I do.

MK: Just you?

BA: You [BA herself] and some of the children. The girls.

MK: What kind of work did you do in the store?

BA: Well, sales. If nobody come buy, I sew, you know. I sew clothes--working clothes, undershirt, underpants--the easy one. We sell, too, those things. That helps the store, too. And I keep the children, too, the small one. My husband go work, coffee land.

MK: In those days, when you make a sale, was it on cash basis or credit basis?

BA: Cash and credit. But credit is not good because (laughs) that one, real hard--credit. Because, oh, hard to collect.

MK: Those days, did you make credit limit?

BA: No. No credit limit.

MK: Those days, what kind of customers did you have?

BA: Filipinos and some Japanese. And some other other kind people.

MK: Where did the customers come from?

BA: In that area.

MK: Those days, what other stores were in that area?

BA: Only Machado Store, and Fujino Store, they call, and Morimoto, and. . . . Manago [Hotel] side place. That's the only store there.

MK: That's the only stores? Oh, okay. Since you were still having coffee farm, where did most of your money come from? The store or the coffee farm?

BA: Coffee. Because we open--you bin put already--we open the coffee land over there, nine acres. And the coffee, that's the one make more money income.

MK: Oh, that's Ke'ei

BA: Ke'ei, yeah. The nine acre, now. Because when we took the---we buy the store, my husband, too, open another nine acres and plant again. Then we have to hire somebody to help him plant and pick coffee, because all ready [to be picked]. And the children. . . . We cannot pick up all, because plenty.

MK: So, you opened the nine acres and you also had the store. How did you manage to open the nine acres?

BA: Well, we have little bit money, and my husband had to hire somebody to help him work on that land and plant. And after that, we build house over there already. Yeah, how many years, I guess so? Maybe

two years, I think, [after opening the land] we build the new house over there.

MK: You build a house over there? And then, did you buy or you lease the land?

BA: We lease the land, but the lumber, we have to buy our own. We let contractor make that house.

MK: How about platform and pulper?

BA: Yeah, all, all, we bought. Everything, machine, like that. My husband put machine, too, over there.

MK: And the nine acres, did they already have coffee growing and producing?

BA: The time we bought? No! We have to bulldozer. My husband have to hire bulldozer. And it's lucky because get bulldozer already. So, one time---no, maybe two, three days, all clean up. And then, he have to hire somebody to help him plant. And before time, it's so hard, because that place is most rock. We have to pack dirt up the mountain, and every hole, maybe half bag for put on that coffee trees. Because no dirt over there. My husband have to hire somebody and truck for pack the dirt. I don't know how many tens of trucks went there.

MK: So, those days, how many workers did your husband have to hire?

BA: Maybe three or four men.

MK: How did he find the workers?

BA: Well, get some Filipino that no more land. They just come for pick coffee, like that. They like to work, so he hire those men.

MK: And those men, they help clear the land; they help plant the coffee . . .

BA: No, no. The clearing is the bulldozer only. Only the one who dig the hole, now, and plant the coffee. That's the one he need.

MK: When the coffee started producing, he hired some more workers?

BA: Pick coffee, like that. Well, because we cannot pick. Because nine acres was big. We have to hire.

MK: That first year, 1959, how much were you paying the workers? You remember?

BA: I wonder? I forget. Maybe five dollars, I think, one day. Yes, five dollars, I think, one day.

MK: Five dollars, one day? Never . . .

BA: Not by hour, now, by day.

MK: By day? You pay by bag of coffee?

BA: Oh, coffee, by bag, yeah. But day work, not picking coffee, the one I stay talking, now. Maybe they help plant coffee, dig, like that--five dollar, one day. But in picking coffee, one dollar quarter [\$1.25], one dollar half [\$1.50], like that, two dollar [per bag of picked coffee].

MK: Those days, did you provide housing for the workers?

BA: No, no.

MK: And your husband, he supervised the workers?

BA: [BA misinterprets question.] No, they get their own house, you know.

MK: And when they working, your husband watch the workers?

BA: [BA misinterprets question.] No, he just go pick them [up] where they live and bring them home.

MK: He didn't have to supervise? Luna?

BA: No, no, no. Because he work with them. He no live there. He just work with them. Just like, you know. He see them. Because he work the same job as they work.

MK: And then, you folks continued the farm and the store. And then, the store, you sold in nineteen. . . .

BA: Sixty. . . . About '68? No? Nineteen. . . .

MK: Sixty-eight [1968], yeah?

BA: Yes. We sold that.

MK: Why did you sell your store?

BA: Well, because the coffee is better than the store. The store cannot make any money. So bad that. (Chuckles) Because plenty people, they just buy and they no pay. Oh, no. My husband said, "'Nough. We have to keep on the coffee. It's better," he said. So, soon as the house build, we move down already. That's all.

MK: Okay. I think, today, we'll finish over here, yeah? And then, next time, we continue.

BA: Come again? Okay. Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 9-54-3-81

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Bernabella Abril (BA)

January 25, 1981

Middle Ke'ei, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Michiko Kodama (MK) and Modesto Daranciang (MD)

MK: Interview with Mrs. Bernabella Abril at her home in Middle Ke'ei, Kona, Hawaii on January 25, 1981.

Okay, Mrs. Abril, by 1968, you had moved to this area in Middle Ke'ei, and by 1973, you started papayas on four acres of land. And by that time, you already had the coffee farm, yeah? You had coffee lands. Can you tell us why you started papaya, too?

BA: You know why? Because papaya prices good and that help us too, you know, for making money.

MK: To start this papaya planting, where did you get the money to do it?

BA: Well, because we have the land over there, we save little money, and then we pay the bulldozer to clear up the four acres.

MK: And this land that you planted the papaya on, did you lease the land?

BA: Yes.

MK: And what were the terms of the lease?

BA: Well, we have to pay it every year.

MK: Do you remember about how much you had to pay?

BA: Oh, not really. Maybe \$15, I think, one acre, before.

MK: And so, four acres, so, about \$70?

BA: Mm hm [yes], one year.

MK: Who did you lease the land from?

BA: Bishop.

MK: Bishop Estate?

BA: Bishop Estate.

MK: And when you opened up the papaya land, how did you get the work on the papaya done?

BA: Well, we have to work, me and my husband. If it's really hard for us, we have to hire somebody to help us.

MK: Who did you hire?

BA: Some of our friends, you know.

MK: What kind of work did they have to do on the papaya farm?

BA: Well, they have to dig hole and pack some dirt for put on that hole so that it helps the papayas grows.

MK: About how many workers did you have . . .

BA: Just one. Me and my husband only work on that . . .

MK: And then, maybe one, part-time, you hire?

BA: Mm hmm [yes], mm hmm.

MK: And those days, about how much did you have to pay for the help?

BA: The helper, oh, before, is not so high, you know, yet. Maybe five dollar, one day, for one person.

MK: And that person, did he live in a house that you folks provided?

BA: No, no. Someplace. Just live for some other place. Then, he come over there and work for us.

MK: Those times when you were growing papaya, how did it affect your coffee work?

BA: No, no, no. No affects us. No. Because we plant 'em in the middle [of the coffee], you know. And the other middle is for all coffees.

MK: How about your time, though?

BA: Well, our time, oh boy, extra time, you know. Yeah, we have to work early and go home late.

MK: So, you just put in more time . . .

- BA: Mm hmm [yes], you do. We do that so that we don't pay too much [for] outside [labor].
- MK: And papaya, you can grow all year 'round?
- BA: Yes, but maybe two years, then it start not bearing fruits already. Only the first two years, then it gives good fruit.
- MK: And so, after two years, what do you have to do?
- BA: Well, just chop 'em again and plant new one.
- MK: The papayas that you used to get from your trees, where did you sell them to?
- BA: Oh, you know this Honaunau Market before? Kuri. . . .
- MD: Kurihara.
- BA: Kurihara. We sold on that, and Watson. You know, that haole over there?
- MD: Watson Farm.
- BA: Yeah, Watson Farm. We do sell over there.
- MK: How did you arrange to sell your papaya?
- BA: We have to go pick, me and my husband, and we brought over here [BA's home]. And an inspector check up which is the best and which not supposed to sell. And then, after that, we bring 'em to the market.
- MK: For you, that time, you had, still, coffee; you had papaya . . .
- BA: Mm hmm [yes], coffee, and papayas, avocados, and any kind of fruits.
- MK: Oh, you had other fruits, then? Were you selling these other fruits, too?
- BA: We do sell avocados. Same Watson, you know. Only Watson.
- MK: How many acres of avocado did you have?
- BA: Well, we just spread 'em on the coffee land. Yeah, just spread 'em on the coffee land. Mix up with the coffee land. Not all avocado, no. We just mix up with the coffee.
- MK: How long did you operate the papaya farm?
- BA: Oh, not so long. Because since my husband died, then I cannot continue, because I cannot do anymore. I cannot drive, so. The boys, they all away. They get married or they go army, like that,

so we just stop it. Only we leave that for use [at] home.

MK: When did your husband pass away?

BA: Nineteen seventy-five. Yeah, 1975, I guess.

MK: When your husband passed away, what happened to the coffee?

BA: Well, I just do it by myself. The children help, and we hire somebody. And then, the rest of the land, I give to the children.

MK: Oh, so they're taking care?

BA: Yeah, now, they taking care.

MK: Nowadays, I've heard, it's hard to find workers?

BA: I know. Cannot, you know, because they like high pay. How can pay it high if no more money?

MK: How much do they want per bag nowadays?

BA: Oh, no, they like more high than the other. . . . Maybe five dollar, one hour. But how can? Cannot. Before, not five dollar, yet, you know. Two fifty [\$2.50], like that, \$3.00.

MD: Before time?

BA: Yeah. Because only now, the high price of the pickers.

MK: Oh, so, 1975, they wanted . . .

BA: More. Two fifty [\$2.50] or \$3.00, like that, you know.

MK: That's per hour?

BA: No, no. By bag, now. Per bag.

MK: So, you gave to your children. . . .

BA: Mm hmm [yes], they come and help me. And I pay them.

MK: And nowadays, what do you think of your life as coffee farmer?

BA: Oh, I just love---I just continue working. But not whole day. Maybe two, three hours. I go early in the morning. Ten o'clock, I come home and cook and do my home work at home. I have plenty home work (chuckles) at home. Yeah, that's what.

MK: And nowadays, where do you sell your coffee to?

BA: Down there, the mill. By the mill.

MD: The co-op?

BA: [Sunset] Co-op. Yes.

MK: Is the co-op any different from the other millers you used to sell to?

BA: No, for my part, maybe just the same.

MK: The same? How about the prices?

BA: Well, get little bit different, but because I used to sell all the time, I have to continue selling.

MK: Why do you have to continue?

BA: Well, because, you know, my good customer since before. So, I just cannot give up.

MK: You were telling us that as a coffee farmer, sometimes, times were hard and, sometimes, times were a little bit better. What did you think about your life as . . .

BA: My life just like just the same. Yeah, just the same. If little hard, well, that's the time for hard time. I would just take 'em. I no give up.

MK: We know you're a mother of 16 children. What do you hope for your children?

BA: I hope they will do the same as we do. Get coffee land or whatever they have work, they just continue working and not just, you know, not keeping on doing the work that they have.

MK: Would you like them to continue taking care of coffee?

BA: I hope so, if some of them can do. The one girl doing, you know, take over some of my land, so I hope they can do the same as we did.

MK: Why do you want that to happen?

BA: So that, maybe, their life get better to us. Well, I no say that my life is better, but it's much better.

MK: Right now?

BA: Mm hmm [yes]. So their children [BA's grandchildren] can learn, and work and farm.

MK: What do you think about your coming to Hawaii and leaving the Philippines?

BA: Yeah, because we try hard to work, that's why, come better life. Maybe, if we no try our best to work, our life not good.

MK: So, which one do you think was better? For you to stay Philippines or for you to come Hawaii?

BA: No, I stay here. For my part, I like here. Because my children was all born here, and I want to see every one of them here.

MK: I think, for today, that's all.

BA: That's all? Oh, that's good. Well, then, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF KONA

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

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